

To the Editor of the New York Times:

I regret that, in an informal response to a question, I used phrases both unfortunate and unclear in their implications so as to alarm the writer of your October 31st editorial. Having spent more than 35 years as a newspaperman before accepting my present post, I share your abhorrence of censorship in any form. This Department has made considerable headway, I believe, in expanding the amount of information available to the press and public -- for, as you point out, only an informed public can intelligently shape the course of governmental decisions.

I believe you would also agree with the following objectives of our government information policies in times of national danger:

- 1) Care should be taken not to disclose information which would be advantageous to our adversaries or endanger our military personnel. This is as militarily essential as camouflage or the concealment of weaponry -- as my own awkward reference to this aspect was intended to convey. To the best of my knowledge, no harmful stories of this kind did appear - and these were the "results" I was praising.

- 2) Care should be taken not to confuse or mislead either the public or our adversaries by a multitude of inconsistent, inaccurate, or unconfirmed statements emanating from a variety of government sources, all of whom appear to be authoritative and none of whom have checked with each other. Surely this Nation's experience with the U-2 affair in 1960 demonstrates the importance of the government speaking with "one voice" -- and I did not mean to imply that a nation priding itself on freedom of dissent was required to speak with one voice. Nor did this Department at any time seek to withhold information from those newspapers which criticized the President's action.
- 3) Considering in this instance the importance of world opinion on our adversary's reaction, the impact of our announcements on that opinion was properly considered in determining their timing and nature.

No doubt, in a long and difficult week, mistakes of judgment as well as wording were committed. My own informal remarks -- which were intended to reflect the above policy -- should have been more carefully phrased and considered. But I hope you will accept my assurance that, within the above framework, my objective is to make available full and accurate information as rapidly as possible.

ARTHUR SYLVESTER
Assistant Sec. of Defense for Public Affairs